NIETZSCHE AND WAGNER.

THE STORY OF A BROKEN FRIENDSHIP AND CHANGED IDEALS—NIETZSCHE'S INSANITY.

The death of Friedrich Nietzsche inevitably calls up the story of an intellectual friendship the violence of whose origin and end was only equalled by the brevity of its existence. That story will have to be called "The Case of Nietzsche," as the book in which the German writer changed from Wagner's greatest devotee to his fiercest enemy was called "The Case of Wagner." The real cause of Nietzsche's break with the man whom he idolized for four years is not known, and is not likely to be cleared up by the death of the philosophic champion of egoism and pessimism. Both men were not only human, they were altogether too human, and it would be asking a great deal to ask one to believe that Nietzsche's apostacy was an intellectual revolution and revulsion pure and simple. The break came at a moment when the two should have been one in a happiness so supreme that intellectual heresy could not possibly have lifted its head for a moment. Wagner was in the midst of a realization of a dream, an ambition more daring than had ever entered the mind of a musician. Nietzsche had heralded the consummation with an impassioned eloquence also without parallel. Yet the herald's trumpet

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE.

becomes mute in the midst of the triumph, and when its tones are next heard they shake the walls of Wagnerism like the blast that

"erst threw down
Old Jericho's substantial town."

The persons least affected by the pother were the conservatives among the friends of Wagner's art, for to them there was the same want of reason in "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" as in "The Case of Wagner." Both were the products of a fermenting brain, more bent on throwing off perfervid rhetoric than measured thought; yet the final explanation in the insanity of the author was perhaps more welcome (if such a thing dare be said) to the irrational Wagnerites than to those who cared more for Wagner's art works than for his notions on vivisection, the regeneration of the human race through vegetarianism, and the other subjects which he proclaimed in his prose writings.

The publication three or four years ago of a biography of Nietzsche, written by his sister, who devoted her life to him after his insanity became pronounced, added considerably to the story of the rupture between the two men, but did not afford an explanation sufficient to close the mouths of gossips and scandal mongers. We shall therefore still hear hints of the opera which Nietzsche is said to have written and the poet-composer to have rudely condemned, and many other things more vague, but perhaps equally groundless. Frau Förster-Nietzsche's discussion of the affair is void of all feeling of hostility to Villa Wahnfried, however, and her account of the beginning of the friendship between the youthful philologist and the mature musician tells of a strangely vehement admiration of the younger for the older man, an admiration, indeed, that suggests the passion of King Ludwig. Frau Förster-Nietzsche, for aught we know to the contrary, is still a devoted Wagnerite. Her husband, Dr. Bernard Förster, was so ardent a disciple of Wagner's that he went to Paraguay in 1886 and founded a colony for the purpose of realizing some of the theories for the regeneration of mankind which Wagner had put forth in "Art and Religion." He died in 1889, and his widow has since then been her unfortunate brother's nurse and literary secretary. It is mainly from her book that this account of the relations between Wagner and Nietzsche is drawn.

They met for the first time at the house of Frau Brockhaus, Wagner's sister, in Leipsic, in November, 1868; Nietzsche was then twenty-four years old and Wagner fifty-seven. The younger man, having abandoned theology, had studied philology in the universities of Bonn and Leipsic. Five months after his meeting with Wagner he was appointed professor of classical philology in the University of Bâle, Switzerland. Within five weeks after he had made Bâle his home he had sought out Wagner at his home in Triebschen, on Lake Lucerne, had been received and invited to spend Whit-Monday with him. He came again and again, and appears to have fallen under the influence of the dramatist as under a spell. The wildest hyperbole will not suffice him to picture the greatness and the charm of his friend. Here are a few expressions from letters written at the time:

Wagner is all that we had hoped of him; a great and lavish mind, an energetic mind, and an entrancingly amiable man.

I have found a man who, as no other, reveals to me the likeness of what Schopenhauer calls "the genius." This is no other than Richard Wagner, about whom you must believe no judgment that appears in the press, the writings of musical pedants, etc. No one knows him, no one can judge him, for all the world stands on another foundation and is not native to his atmosphere. In him there reigns so unconditional an ideality, so deep and touching a humanity, so sublime an earnestness of life, that near him I feel myself in neighborhood of the divine.

I have my Italy, like you, only that I cannot fly there oftener than from Saturday to Sunday. Its name is Triebschen, which is already quite a home to me. Latterly I have been there four times, and scarcely a week elapses but a letter makes the same journey. What I learn, hear, see and understand there is indescribable. Schopenhauer and Goethe, Æschylus and Pindar are still alive, believe me.

When you come and see me we must go to Triebschen. It is an infinite enrichment of one's life to meet such a genius at close quarters. For me everything that is best and loveliest is knit with the names of Schopennauer and Wagner.

In this spirit of enthusiastic veneration for a man who seemed to him Schopenhauer, Goethe, Æschylus and Pindar, all rolled into one, Nietzsche now entered the lists to do battle for Wagner by publishing in 1872 his "Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik" ("The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music"), the first of his polemics in favor of the new art-work. In the same year he attended the laying of the cornerstone of the festival theatre at Bayreuth and visited Wagner. At Easter, 1873, he goes to the Wagnerian Mecca again, and takes part in the meeting of the Patronatsverein, whose aim it was to assist Wagner with money for the first festival. He goes again on an invitation in August, 1874. Meanwhile there were evidences of a growing coolness in the friendship, and in the August visit there may have been a quarrel over Brahms. At any rate, there is an anecdote from Mme. Förster-Nietzsche's book, told in the translation made by William Ashton Ellis for the preface to Volume VI of "Richard Wagner's Prose Works."

My brother and I heard the "Triumphlied" of Brahms in the Bâle Cathedral. It was a splendid performance and pleased Fritz very much. When he went to Bayreuth in August he took the pianoforte arrangement with him, apparently in the naïve belief that Wagner would like it. I say "apparently," for upon later reflection it has occurred to me that this red bound "Triumphlied" was meant as a sort of goad, and therefore Wagner's prodigious wrath seems to have been not altogether groundless. So I will leave the continuation of the tale to Wagner, who had an exquisite fashion of satirizing himself:

"Your brother set this red book on the piano; whenever I went into the drawing room the red thing stared me in the face; it exasperated me, as a red rag to a bull. Perhaps I guessed that Nietzsche wanted it to say to me, 'See here another man who can turn out something good!' and one evening I broke out with a vengeance."

Wagner had a hearty laugh at the recollection. "What did my brother say?" I asked in alarm. "Nothing at all," answered Wagner. "He simply blushed, and looked at me in astonishment and modest dignity. I would give a hundred thousand marks to have such splendid manners as this Nietzsche, always distinguished, always well bred; it's an immense advantage in the world." That story of Wagner's came back to my mind at this moment (spring, 1875). "Fritz," I said, "why didn't you tell that tale about Brahms's 'Triumphlied'?' Wagner related the whole thing to me himself." Fritz looked straight before him and held his tongue. At last he said, beneath his breath, "Lisbeth, then Wagner was not great."

Here Wagner seems to have been "altogether too human" to suit the gentle Nietzsche, who was probably as much amazed at the exhibition of pettiness of character and ill-temper in his idol as he had formerly been amazed at the greatness of his mind. Brahms was ever a thorn in the flesh to Wagner, as he still is to the tribe that salaam and kowtow at Villa Wahnfried, and to bring the vocal score of his "Triumphlied," composed in honor of Germany's triumph over France, into the house of the man who had celebrated that triumph with his 'Kaisermarsch" was an offence for which "the master" felt it his privilege to reprimand his disciple like a schoolboy. He may have laughed at it afterward, but at the time, we warrant, he fully justified Nietzsche's remark to his sister that that time "Wagner was not great." Still there was no open split between the two, although Nietzsche accepted none of several invitations given to him to hear the rehearsals of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" in 1875. Meanwhile, he was writing his heraldic fanfare, "Richard Wagner at Bayreuth," which appeared in the early part of July of the festival year 1876. Nietzsche follows it to the Wagnerian Mecca, having formed the purpose to hear all of the rehearsals and all of the performances. He hears the rehearsals and rushes away without warning even to his sister, who comes to join him. To judge by a remark in an unpublished sketch written in 1878 he had found himself deceived. "My fault was in coming to Bayreuth with an ideal: I had to experience the bitterest undeception." And while experiencing this undeception he found himself always the centre of admiring circles, who praised his brochure until he could no longer endure hearing its title. And Wagner was among the flatterers. Frau Förster-Nietzsche is anxious to show that Wagner did nothing to offend her brother. "Wagner, in fact, displayed the utmost eagerness to honor and distinguish him in every respect; but Fritz withdrew from these marks of esteem wherever he could; this loud and noisy praise of Wagner's was repugnant to him." He returned to Bayreuth to hear four performances, but kept himself as far as possible aloof from the coryphantic throng of worshippers.

The men met only a few times after 1876 in the course of a visit to a mutual friend at Sorrento. Nietzsche had already begun work on his "Menschliches, Allzumenschliches" ("Human, Altogether too Human"), in which he began to lampoon his former master. In 1888 came "Der Fall Wagner" ("The Case of Wagner")—the bitterest attack on the Bayreuth master's works and theories that has ever been printed. Toward them Wagner's public attitude always remained dignified and reserved, and six months after the issue of this book night settled down over poor Nietzsche's mind forever. There is evidence a-plenty that Nietzsche always considered himself aggrieved and never forgot the intellectual debt which he owed to the early meetings at Triebschen. Even after he had written "Der Fall Wagner" he wrote: "Here, while I am speaking of the recreations of my life I lack the word to express my gratitude for that which formed my deepest and my heartiest solace. This beyond all doubt was the intimate communion with Richard Wagner. I would give little for the rest of my human relations; at no price would I cut out of my life the days of Triebschen, days of trust, of cheerfulness, of sublime inspirations, of deep moments. I know not what others have gone through with Wagner: our heaven was never traversed by a cloud." On the authority of an unnamed writer in the "Revue des deux Mondes," Houston Stewart Chamberlain says in his book on Wagner that shortly before insanity enshrouded his mind Nietzsche journeyed to Lucerne, drove out to Triebschen, and sat there apart by the lake apparently occupied in tracing signs in the sand; but when his companion bent down to look into his face she saw the tears streaming from his eyes.

It would be idle to attempt to find any bond of reconciliation between the books which Nietzsche wrote pro and those which he wrote contra Wagner. On both sides there are evidences in abundance of that curse of musical dialectic—the love of phrase for the sake of phrase and the want of conviction fortified on fact. More than any other writers, musical critics of the transcendental kind love the music of their own words, and having an art that is so largely subjective to deal with they are freer than all other critics from the thralls of logic, reason and common sense. Pretty words suffice them for praise and fulgurant phrases for argument. It would be quite as unwise to cite Nietzsche against Wagner as for him. There is no more need to take him seriously in either of his attitudes than John F. Runcimay or Bernard Shaw (pardon, shade of Nietzsche!). But he has been a power in the world in the promotion of pessimistic philosophy, and his jugglery with words was amazing. Musicians will need not long have to reckon with him, but moralists will. With their disputations we have nothing to do; it will suffice the present purpose to bring together a few expressions to show how complete was the somersault which he accomplished in the Wagner matter. In 1876 Nietzsche asserted that Wagner was not only the discoverer of a new art, but of art itself, and of its true relation to human society. Wagner was a musician, philosopher, historian, æsthetician, critic master of language, mythologist and "mytho-poet." The kernel of his nature and of his works was "fidelity, unselfish fidelity"; he was accomplishing the first great universal deed since Alexander conquered the earth. The Hellenizing of the world and—to make this possible—the Orientalizing of the Hellenic was the double task of Alexander the Great, and the last great deed of universal significance; "but the world being now sufficiently Orientalized longs again to be Hellenized, and out of this longing there has grown up the need of a series of anti-Alexanders, and one of them is Richard Wagner." Between Kant and Eleates, between Schopenhauer and Empedocles, between Æschylus and Richard Wagner, there are such affinities that one can almost feel the relativity of all ideas of time. "Wagner was the absolutely free artist, who cannot do otherwise than think in all the arts at once," the reconciler and mediator between seemingly sundered spheres, "the restorer of unity and totality in the artistic faculty"; "it is more than a figure of speech to say that he has surprised Nature with his gaze; that he has seen her naked," "and so at last the advent of the greatest magician and benefactor among mortals, the dithyrambic dramatist," etc.

Then comes the revulsion and now the Nietzsche who had thus extolled the artist Wagner doubted if he was either dramatist or musician. He did not know, indeed, whether or not the god of his earlier idolatry was entitled to be called a German or even a human being ("Mensch"). "Is he not a disease?" He was sure, however, that he was "a modern Cagliostro" who had "made music ill," a "master of hypnotic tricks." His music is "endlessness without melody"; within him there arises first the hallucination of gesture and to fit that he seeks for 'tone semiotik.' His music is the gymnastic of ugliness on the tightrope of discord"; his manner of musical development is "poverty-stricken, embarrassed, amateurish"; he is admirable only in the mountain of trifles, the "greatest miniaturist in music, capable of squeezing an infinity of significance and sweetness into the tiniest space"; Wagner's music, in brief, is "simply bad music, perhaps the worst that has ever been written." Nietzsche discusses Wagner's notions of redemption, and, taking "Lohengrin" as an illustration, reduces the fundamental idea of its story to any one of four formulas, of which the reader may make choice: First, "Hysterical young women prefer to be redeemed by their physicians." Second—"The worst of results may follow if one does not go to bed betimes." Third—"It is best not to know too much about the person one marries." Fourth—"'Lohengrin' contains an anathema against research and inquiry. In it Wagner represents the Christian conception: Thou must and shalt believe! It is a crime against the Highest and Holiest to be scientific." That will suffice.

H. E. K.

ANTIQUE "NEFS."

SILVER MODELS OF SHIPS OF FORMER DAYS—THE DUKE OF SAXE-COBURG'S UNIQUE COLLECTION.

From The London Telegraph.

Among the artistic hobbies which have been taken up warmly by various members of the royal family none was, perhaps, more interesting than that of the late Duke of Saxe-Coburg in the collection of antique nefs, or models of ships in silver. Concerning these, his Royal Highness was both an enthusiast and an expert, and the specimens he amassed, numbering just upon forty, include some of the finest ever turned out by sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century goldsmiths. In artistic circles at the present time much surmise exists as to the ultimate destination of the unique and intrinsically extremely valuable collection, and it is suggested that it would form an appropriate memorial of one held in such deep respect throughout the navy if they could be acquired for the nation. The Duchess Marie doubtless knows what was the wish of the late Duke on the subject since the lamented death of their son, but it may be pointed out that in no form of artistic handicraft are our great public treasure houses so poorly furnished as with these. There is no example at all in the British Museum, South Kensington is little better off, while in the Wallace collection, at Hertford House, so boundlessly rich in almost every conceivable object of beauty not one is to be seen. Yet in the old days such models were frequent gifts between royal personages, their professed purpose being a table ornament to contain wine. In every instance they were constructed with the greatest care and accuracy, and possess, therefore, the additional historic value of illustrating correctly the lines and rig of the fighting ships and merchantmen which carried "Those dogs of an elder day, who sacked the golden ports."

The Duke lent the collection to be shown, it may be remembered, at the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891, where they constituted one of the most notable features of the Loan Art Section. All displayed were admirable examples of Old French, Old Dutch, Nuremburg, or Augsburg craftsmanship, and were embellished with an immense amount of fascinating detail. One of the largest of the seventeenth century was the model of the three masted Felicitas, made at Nuremburg, entirely in parcel gilt. She is shown under full sail, with fighting tops in the masts, and the hull is beautifully chased with a triumphal procession of Neptune and the seagods. A somewhat smaller one, made at the same town, has only two masts, but has a large two story covered deck house. Grouped upon her are soldiers, sailors, men and women, and she carries guns both on deck and at the portholes. One of the French specimens bears the name Amicitia, and has a covered deck with two houses and one large cannon, while she carries officers and women, men and sailors. Her flags are flying, and upon the sails various crests and devices are engraved. A pair of Dutch examples are three masted open decked ships under full sail, with the crew and several soldiers and some mortars and round shot. The hulls are chased with mermaids, and there are finely outlined heads and busts of sea monsters at the bows. One from Augsburg has twelve guns at the portholes, the head of Pan at the bows, and a flag at the stern. The hull is chased with sea nymphs, and bears the inscription, "Clytus Rex Oceanus." In this one there are sailors in the rigging. Those who knew the late Duke's admiration for these rarities were always glad to tell him of any to be seen or bought, and the brethren of the Trinity House, wishing to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his connection with that famous corporation, presented him with one that he especially prized in a model nearly two feet long, made in Nuremburg in 1650, representing a trader. One of the most recent additions to the collection portrayed a fight between Vasco de Gama and black braves. In almost all the silver or silver-gilt hulls stand upon two pairs of little wheels, so that they may be conveyed easily along the table from guest to guest to fulfil their original purpose.

It would be an interesting bypath in the fields of the silversmith's handicraft to discover when these quaintly delightful toys passed out of favor. Very small specimens of boats and sailing ships may occasionally be seen at the well accredited dealers in old plate, and are generally quickly acquired by discerning women for their "silver tables." But these large nefs are assuredly very scarce, and must at all times have been extremely costly. The two most celebrated modern models in silver are, of course, the beautiful pair representing the Britannia and the Victoria, which were the offering of the Royal Navy and Marines to the Queen on the occasion of her Jubilee in 1887. For the representation of the noble battleship, so sadly lost a few years later, a set of exact drawings to scale were prepared, and the fineness of the work in this may be judged from the fact that each gun of her Nordenfeldt armament, with its carriage, can be stood upon a florin, and weighs half an ounce, though it contains no fewer than one hundred and eighteen pieces; and in the Britannia the rigging and other details are indicated with equal delicacy. Some few owners of successful racing yachts have had them reproduced as miniatures in silver, but the idea is by no means a hackneyed one at present. From incidental inquiries it appears, however, that the war has brought into fashionable favor the naval field gun in silver as the adjunct of the smoking room table to contain cigars or cigarettes, and these are faultlessly correct in their proportionate adherence to the original lines.

FOR SUSPENSION.

From The Chicago News.

Pearl—He said if I refused him I would find him suspended from a tree in the park.

Ruby—What did you say.

Pearl—I offered to loan him our hammock.